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# **Mississippi Department of Human Services**

## **Division of Family and Children's Services**

### **Child and Family Service Review Statewide Self Assessment**



December, 2003

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Intakes of reports can be done at the central hotline office and transmitted to the county offices or taken directly at the county level. MACWIS Help desk maintains a full time staffing of 3 workers to answer any questions or problems county staff may have in the course of using MACWIS. As needed, additional help is added to ensure full coverage.

MACWIS was piloted August- October 2000. In June 2001, the implementation of MACWIS into the 5 blocks of counties was completed. Initial estimates on the amount of training needed were reduced due to budget constrictions, and additional budget cuts ended a contract for resources identified for developing supportive materials to help supervisors review cases on MACWIS. Full MACIWS integration into county case work has been a slow and evolving process.

• **Lessons learned about the system during the Statewide Assessment focus groups, interviews and consultations:**

Interviews were done on workers in 6 counties and representatives from the state offices and all regions were involved with Mock Reviews on MACWIS to provide the following information. A total of 87 staff members were involved with the Mock review statewide.

- Additional training and coordination is needed to integrate MACWIS into policy and practice.
- Workers are not always sure where to enter information
- Management reports to track data are essential, and were needed from the initial implementation of the system to ensure data integrity. Too much time passed between the initiation of the system and the review of the data, making data cleanup problematic.
- Adequate staffing is needed for data accuracy. Data quality has been significantly compromised in regions without enough staff.
- The legacy system had no ongoing validity check. In MACWIS, each individual must maintain their workload, and can verify whether case is open or should be closed. The worker has access to their data and can update information as necessary.
- Reliance on training to ensure complete data entry is not enough, data edits are needed to ensure complete AFCARS/NCANDS data is entered.
- Issues related to flawed AFACARS submissions are being corrected.
- The effect of the SACWIS system on direct service practice was significantly underestimated in many ways, including: the learning curve for more seasoned workers to translate the paper processes into MACWIS, the need for more training for supervisors to help them make the transition in reviewing an electronic case file, the time and effort required to enter investigations, document cases, use reports to manage for outcomes, and the necessity of remaining in the office to document narratives that had previously been portable (taken home, completed waiting for doctor visits, etc.). Much more time than originally anticipated was needed to develop the system, adequately train users, document the usage of the system, integrate the system into policy and practice, and correct users' errors. The ability to

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10<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the following month. For example, the Issues Report for June 2003 is compiled and forwarded to the Deputy Director of Programs by July 10, 2003. The Family and Children's Services Division's Deputy Director of Programs reviews the report, signs it and then forwards it to the Regional Directors and requires their response within thirty (30) calendar days of the date of the report. Copies of the monthly non-compliance/issues report are provided to the Training Coordinator to review for training related problems and to the Placement Director to review for provider issues.

**Findings:**

Through MACWIS, a report is in development to measure compliance with the case review dates. Through the case review process, counties with a full-time FCR indicated that 80% of the cases were within the time frames expected, however that number was significantly lower in the counties without full-time review staff, dropping to less than 50%.

• **Lessons learned about case planning during Statewide Assessment focus groups, interviews, and consultations:**

- Foster Care review and the quality assurance process of systematically reviewing children's out of home cases was seen as having a positive effect on the quality of casework. Those areas that have not had a regular reviewer assigned due to under staffing have noted a significant drop in the quality of the case documentation and frequency of review.
- The new DCFS 4352 review instrument, and planned reporting process were seen as an advancement in the review process. Because it uses the "best practice" measurements incorporated into the Federal Child and Family Review Instrument, it more clearly measures cases with same criteria expected in In-Home cases.
- Notification and case planning with the parents and caretakers were noted as continuing to be problematic.
- Lack of parental involvement in subsequent reviews was noted and indicated as a statewide issue. Workers need to be encouraged to empower their families to a higher level of involvement in the case planning process. Review of cases indicate that the county conference attendance by family members is as small as 30% in counties.
- Staff need additional training and practice in facilitation skills to aid in the initial development of the case plan with the family, to engage the family in the process and to aid in the effectiveness of the county Conference.
- The Foster care review process in some areas was seen as being too focused on finding missing information or answering questions to document the process rather than helping ensure all case members are able to talk about the family issues bringing the child into care.
- Additional training in all areas of the job, from the social work practice to the documentation, was noted as being of significant importance.
- Case plans lack specificity and are not updated or individualized. Workers

*2. How effectively is the State able to meet the case review system requirements that parents of children in foster care participate in developing the child's case plan? In responding, consider their participation in activities such as identifying strengths and needs, determining goals, requesting specific services and evaluating progress related to their children?*

- **State's definition of "family involvement" in case planning:**

The expectation of family involvement includes all family members. The Foster Care Reviewer is able to determine the extent of the parental involvement in the child's case plan by exploring documentation in the narrative section of MACWIS and by information gathered during the course of the case review such as interviews with the Social Worker as well as information obtained during the County Conference with the parents.

During the course of the case record review and the County Conference, the Reviewer will determine if the child was involved in his/her case planning and will indicate the findings on the review instrument. The Reviewer will also determine if there was parental involvement in the case planning and indicate the finding on the review instrument. This is part of the total review information that is shared with the Deputy Director of Programs, Training, Placement, and Regional Administration.

- **Policies and practices to engage families in case planning:**

In Mississippi's Family Centered process, parents (mothers, biological fathers and legal fathers) are invited to attend the County Conference in which the Foster Care Reviewer facilitates a discussion of the progress that is made by the parents (as well as the agency) in achievement of the child's permanent plan which is an element of the child's case plan, *(If the biological parents parental rights to the child have been terminated they are not notified of the County Conference.)* The Adolt ISP serves as the primary agenda for the County Conference. The Foster Care Reviewer will lead discussions about the strengths/needs of the family, asking for input from the agency, parents, and any other conference participants. The Social Worker will make notes on the Strengths/Needs worksheet. The comments made during the County Conference are recorded by the Foster Care Reviewer in Part 'B' of the Youth Court Hearing and Summary Review form and sent through MACWIS to the Social Worker and the Area Social Work Supervisor for review and forwarding to the court of jurisdiction for a judicial determination.

**Findings:**

Based on interviews with workers, if parent can be located, the first meeting with the parent focuses on developing the case plan, with a second meeting presenting the printed plan for the parent/caretakers signature.

Additional FCR staff are needed to ensure 100% compliance with review dates.

- **Methods for engaging both parents in case planning:**

and will be incorporated in the Quality Assurance process, and used to promote better practice. It is expected that this additional information provided by the participants will help the agency target areas needing additional attention and it is expected that these surveys will provide additional insight into the needs of the individuals involved with the case.

- **System for tracking case review outcomes:**

- MACWIS reports and narrative recordings,
- Annual permanency reviews
- Foster Care Review Program case reviews
- Mock Reviews

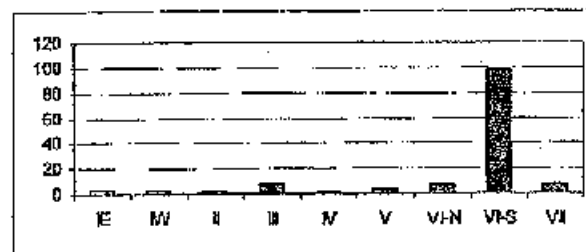
- **Lessons learned about the review process during the Statewide Assessment focus groups, interviews and consultations:**

Currently, there are not enough Foster Care Review staff to adequately and consistently cover all areas of the state. Those areas not consistently reviewed have noted a decrease in documentation, and an inability to ensure that each child in custody is reviewed every 6 months.

- **Quality and effectiveness of the State's review process:**

Maintaining a full Case Review staff continues to be difficult because of external factors, such as service deployment and staff illness, in addition to insufficient coverage in some areas due to the number of cases. For those cases in areas that have been under-served by case review, a marked decrease in the quality of documentation has been noted.

**Number of Overdue 6 Month Administrative Reviews - by Region  
Based on MACWIS Reporting**



In reviewing the data report of cases that have missed the 6 month review the following information was determined (based on a random sample of 26) 58% of the cases should have been closed on MACWIS, but the custody case remained open. 35% of the cases had input related problems. Only approximately 5% of those in the sample were accurately reported as missing reviews.

During the County Conference, the Foster Care Reviewer gives each participant (including the child's care giver) the opportunity to comment on the agency's recommended permanency plan as well as any issues regarding the child's placement in their home including (but not limited to) the child's school performance, the child's health, the child's emotional and behavioral status, the child's visitation with their parents, siblings or other relatives. These comments are recorded on the Youth Court Hearing and Summary Review Report (Part B) and forwarded to the county of responsibility via MACWIS within 7 calendar days. The county Social Worker will then complete Part C of the Youth Court Hearing and Summary Review within 7 calendar days and the Area Social Work Supervisor will review the Social Worker's entries and lock the review within 7 calendar days. The entire Youth Court Hearing and Summary Review can be printed and forwarded (along with the child's ISP and the adult ISP) to the court of jurisdiction within 7 calendar days. Foster Care reviewers monitor the process of notification for each case at the time of the case review and indicate in their report any non-compliance with the agency's notification policy. Revisions to the 4253 allow the Foster Care Review Program Administrator Senior to track the county's efforts to notify each mandated invitee which will result in a report to the Deputy Director of Programs as to the level of compliance the agency exhibits with regard to notification. All invitees are given the opportunity to be heard in the review conference at least twice a year. Client surveys have not been a part of the agency's protocol but are being incorporated into the Foster Care review process as of August 1, 2003. Notification of court hearings are the province of the court.

- **Special efforts to engage care givers in the review or hearing process:**

Although it is not mandated by agency policy, some counties attach a response sheet to their notification letters that gives any invited participant the opportunity to make written comments regarding the plans for the children in their care in the event that they are unable to attend the County Conference. The worker contacts the family members based on their written feedback, the completed response forms are given to the Foster Care Reviewer at the time of the County Conference and filed in the case record for documentation of their participation. The absent invitee's written statements are attached to the Youth Court Hearing and Review Summary which is forwarded to the court of jurisdiction.

During Foster Parent Training, the importance of working in partnership with the agency toward the best interest of the child is stressed. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in County Conferences and in any other meetings affecting their foster child.

- **Lessons learned during the Statewide Assessment focus groups, interviews, and consultations about the State's capacity to involve care givers in hearings and reviews:**

The focus group identified the ability of the Social Worker and the County Conference facilitator to engage the family was not consistent throughout the state. Additional